

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF POLITICAL CONSPIRACY THEORIES

revised March 2019

We all know that conspiracies exist. There is ample indisputable historical proof in such matters as: the Communist Party USA, KKK involvement in crimes—including murder—which involved local law enforcement collusion and coverup such as the 1964 murders of Charles Eddie Moore and Henry H. Dee in Mississippi; Other well known conspiracies include: Watergate, Enron, tobacco and drug companies suppressing adverse data about health-related consequences of their products, the Mafia, military-scandals such as Tailhook, Abu Ghraib, Haditha, and the Afghan "*kill team*" convictions [see "*Soldier Given 3 Years In Plot*"; *Los Angeles Times*, 8/6/11, pAA-1]; military academy cheating, criminal prosecutions of politicians and law enforcement or correctional officers who lied under oath to protect themselves or others [see for example "*5 Police Convicted In Shootings*", *Los Angeles Times*, 8/6/11, pA7].

Political conspiracy theories are usually the most intricate. They arise most often when the "*official version*" of events seems inadequate, flawed, or incomplete -- and these situations present an opportunity for all sorts of bizarre and facile "*explanations*"

However: the entire purpose of most political conspiracy theories is NOT to carefully present evidence and then use reason and logic to arrive at sound, verifiable conclusions. Instead, most political conspiracy theories are primarily an intellectual device by which individuals and organizations identify and demonize their perceived enemies whom they propose to vanquish.

There is a distinction between perceiving an "opponent" (i.e. an honorable, decent, and legitimate competitor--albeit wrong-headed from one's own perspective) versus an "enemy" (i.e. someone characterized in terms calculated to evoke fear, contempt, suspicion, distrust, and revulsion.)

Most conspiracy theories focus upon enemies, not on opponents. One's receptivity to logic and evidence diminishes drastically when one confronts "*enemies*" as opposed to "*opponents*".

The substantive content of a political conspiracy theory is often completely irrelevant to the underlying purpose of the theory and, in any event, there is no possible way to refute or disprove most such theories to the satisfaction of its authors or adherents because most political conspiracy theories are constructed to be self-sealing so that contradictory data can be instantly dismissed, ignored, or de-valued. The reason is because the theory functions as a problem-solving device but the actual "*problem*" has virtually nothing to do with the details regarding people and events which are part of the conspiratorial narrative.

The actual "problem" which political conspiracy theories seek to address is explaining one's sense of impotence--i.e. providing plausible reasons for why one's values, ideas, policy preferences, and political candidates seem to be repeatedly ignored, disparaged, violated, or defeated -- particularly over long periods of time. Consequently, the conspiracy theory expresses the rage felt when a person perceives himself or his group as persistent "*losers*" in all matters of importance.

Therefore, the conspiracy theory functions as a "rolodex" of people and organizations who should not be permitted to have a place at the table, because "*they*" despoil our country, "*they*" defile its true values, and "*they*" plan to rob us of our heritage and "*they*" seek to make impotence a permanent feature of our lives.

That's the reason why a political conspiracy theory can never be refuted--because it does not rely upon the individual facts, assertions, or conclusions which make up the literal text of the theory. Instead, it is a primal scream against perceived villains whom are thought to have ruined our society or whom are working toward destroying our individual sovereignty.

The BEST conspiracy theories combine kernels of indisputable fact with less compelling data (and often outright falsehoods). The kernels of fact make political conspiracy theories alluring.

However, there are NO TESTS which authors and believers of a theory will allow IF such tests have the genuine capacity to disprove their theory.

Conspiracy theories are usually authored by persistent losers in public policy debates to account for why those persons are frustrated and seemingly impotent to affect public policy decisions and elections over long periods of time.

ALL societies (except those in the midst of civil war) have a prevailing point of view. Somebody always winds up "losing" a policy debate or an election and, consequently, they are not invited to the table to make important decisions. Conspiracy proponents often declare that their "*battle*" was "*lost decades ago*" or they declare an imminent expiration date for the existence of our country if our "*brainwashed*" fellow countrymen do not "*wake up*" and recognize the danger confronting us.

Anger and frustration is a normal human response to feelings of endless impotence. Conspiracy theories "*solve*" the underlying problem by explaining WHY one perceives oneself as powerless, disrespected, unappreciated, and ignored. It's really very simple—malevolent powerful beings, working in secret, are responsible.

In my experience, I've found most conspiracy advocates to be profoundly anti-intellectual—even though they may simultaneously produce reams of what they consider "*proof*" and "*evidence*" for their point of view.

Conspiracy authors almost never concede even the hypothetical possibility that their paradigm might be flawed in some fundamental respect. Furthermore, conspiracy authors/researchers don't simply allege that a critic or skeptic is *mistaken* in their viewpoint. Instead, they almost always assert that critics or skeptics facilitate the success of evil cabals who consciously are working to destroy our way of life.

In short, conspiracy believers proclaim that their interpretation is not just intellectually *superior* to other interpretations, but theirs is the ONLY interpretation possible and any disagreements are the result of morally and intellectually defective beings—who are, perhaps, even agents of the conspiracy!

Similarly, conspiracy believers usually declare that every issue or controversy is susceptible to only one correct interpretation and, furthermore, our public policy options are limited to only one correct position—which, "*coincidentally*" always conforms to the conspiracy believer's personal political preferences.

Typically, conspiracy adherents will entertain questions and comments about their theory only so long as their fundamental premises and conclusions are not challenged. Rigorous critiques are instantly perceived as hostile attacks by hopelessly naïve, ignorant, or "*brainwashed*" individuals—or, perhaps, "*smeared*" initiated by "*agents*" of the conspiracy who are seeking to "*divert*" attention away from themselves and thus "*waste*" time and resources in "*pointless*" intellectual debates or "*disinformation*" campaigns.

Furthermore, conspiracy believers are pre-disposed to believing the worst possible motives regarding their adversaries. Consequently, conspiracy proponents often arrive at conclusions without asking their perceived adversaries a single question.

Conspiracy advocates often assert that their fellow countrymen cannot be relied upon to understand events and make correct decisions. Why not? Because they believe that vast numbers of their countrymen have been "*brainwashed*" and "*cannot think for themselves*". In their scheme of things, only conspiracy believers are able to recognize and escape from the clever mind-tricks and ulterior motives of their adversaries.

There are two methods of discussing or analyzing political conspiracy theories:

- (1) Philosophical discussion (i.e mostly speculation)
- (2) Evaluation of factual evidence

(1) PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION

Such discussions may be valuable, relevant, and fun ... but, in the final analysis, they are primarily speculative in nature and do not rise above the level of casual conversation.

In this approach, everyone's ideas are considered just as relevant or valuable as anybody else's. There is asserted to be a moral and practical equivalence to virtually every assertion made and, consequently, nothing in dispute can be resolved.

In this approach, each participant brings his/her familiarity and understanding of many different information sources to bear upon the discussion – without being prepared to substantiate anything. Questions are asked, statements are made, tentative conclusions may be presented, but nobody expects verifiable documentation or substantiation of each and every point raised nor does anyone seriously expect to resolve every disputed idea or assertion.

(2) FACT-BASED RESEARCH, STUDY, ANALYSIS

This approach is much more labor-intensive because careful research and analysis is required. *In this approach...*

- specific assertions or statements are made
- the truth or falsity of each assertion or statement must be determined
- any documentation provided must be reviewed and then verified to establish that it is factually accurate, truthful, and germane to the discussion
- truthful assertions and statements must then be evaluated, weighed for importance, relevance, or emphasis
- factual data is combined to form arguments or theories
- those arguments and theories must then be evaluated to assure they don't exceed whatever factual evidence has thus far been discovered
- standard rules of logic and evidence must be applied – in other words, one has to understand the qualitative difference between primary and secondary sources of evidence and one must have a general familiarity with the principles of sound logic, i.e. how to recognize and avoid (or refute) fallacious arguments
- material presented as direct quotations must, in fact, be quotations not paraphrases or subjective interpretations
- credible conclusions or assertions cannot be based upon gossip, rumor, hearsay, anecdotes, half-truths, gross exaggerations, personal prejudice, malice, or outright falsehoods
- in addition, there must be recognition that, sometimes, available evidence may be incomplete, ambiguous, or incapable of being verified. Normally there is recognition that honorable and intelligent people may arrive at fundamentally different interpretations of whatever data is under scrutiny
- one has to recognize the difference between innocent errors versus intentional acts of omission and commission. The latter category would include such matters as...
 - o deliberate misquotation or paraphrasing so as to change the original author's intended meaning
 - o biased selection of evidence in order to discredit someone
 - o suppression of pertinent data
 - o inability to provide high-quality evidence when making highly pejorative accusations

The “problem” with the “fact-based” route of inquiry is that such evidence may not be convenient or helpful to the conspiracy theory under scrutiny.

Consequently, like all fiction-writers, the conspiracy author wants to be free to fabricate his villains, put words into their mouth and thoughts into their head, and then control the plot and ultimate outcome of the story – all without being held responsible or accountable for any unkind or untrue statements and conclusions.

As previously mentioned, political conspiracy theories are problem-solving devices. They exist solely to offer an hypothesis for why persons and groups perceived as noxious enemies to the commonweal have, nevertheless, been successful and predominant over long periods of time in achieving power, influence, status, and wealth.

Such theories are often created by the “losers” in public policy debates—particularly if the losers have rarely (or never) been successful in influencing or determining public policy over long periods of time.

The hypothesis of “losers” is as follows:

It is inconceivable that the same person(s) and group(s) could repeatedly prevail in elections and policy debates and thus wield power and influence over long periods of time (plus accumulate purportedly undeserved wealth, status, awards, and honors) without the reason being some underlying and ongoing corruption of political processes.

From the "losers" perspective, the simple "law of averages" should produce periodic sustained and decisive victories for their personal political preferences (i.e. candidates and policies) and, consequently, they (the perennial losers) should have a roughly equal impact upon shaping the public debate and winning political contests.

The fundamental flaw in this argument is simply that there is no applicable formula from history or logic that would help us establish typical or average rates of "success" or "favorable results" with respect to political contests, policy debates, elections, measurements of power, influence, wealth, awards, and honors.

In other words, there is no pre-existing norm or baseline that can be used for comparison purposes in order to determine when one prevailing viewpoint has exceeded "the norm" – because there is NO norm!

Just like, for example, there is no known formula or baseline for sports team competition.

If the Boston Red Sox do not win a world series for 86 years (!) does that mean "a conspiracy" must have been responsible, i.e. some secret agreement by corrupt persons to prevent Boston from winning the world series or from even reaching the final playoffs?

Why? Because "the law of averages" should have produced a world series win long before 86 years had elapsed? Because "chance" could not possibly account for such a long period of failure? Because random, unintended, or unpredictable events or circumstances could not possibly apply to such a long period of failure in competitive contests?

To test a hypothesis, one must create an experiment. But what experiment can serve as a conclusive test for a political conspiracy theory and thus hypothetically permit its falsification?

One begins by asking a question:

"What will give me one result if my hypothesis is true but a different result if my hypothesis is false?"

Experiments must then be designed to find out whether or not predictions made are correct.

For example, suppose the printer connected to your computer stops working. You form a tentative hypothesis that there is something wrong with the cable connecting the printer to the computer. If your hypothesis is correct, then if you replace the cable with a working cable, the printer should work again.

You perform an experiment by borrowing a friend's PC cable and hooking it up in place of your own. Suppose your printer worked after you installed the friend's PC cable.

Does that "prove" your hypothesis that your own cable was defective?

Not necessarily! Perhaps, your cable was fine but just loose. Or perhaps there was some dust interfering with the cable connection and simply removing the cable eliminated the underlying dust problem. There could even be other explanations. So how does a researcher determine, conclusively, the answer?

CONSPIRACY "SCHOLARSHIP" – part 1

Political conspiracy theories involve infinitely more complex possibilities than PC cable problems. First, there are huge numbers of both known (and unknown) interactions between and among scores or hundreds or thousands of human beings. How does an honest researcher recognize and appropriately analyze/weigh the numerous complexities and variables of human behavior and motivations?

Conspiracy theorists rarely have personal contact with the persons or organizations they perceive and write about as "conspirators". Consequently, they are in the position of making final, definitive judgments about character, integrity, patriotism and motives from long-distance. But because they start from a "loser's" perspective, they are usually pre-disposed to believing the worst possible motives and explanations!

Furthermore, conspiracy "scholarship" suffers from several major anomalies that normally are considered markers for irrational, illogical, or non-factual conclusions.

In the history of modern political conspiracy arguments, there rarely has been peer review (for example: no journals created to facilitate debate by differing schools of thought), no acknowledgement of substantive error by any author, and no attempt to refute alternative conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theorists ask us to believe that they are uniquely insightful even while, simultaneously, they seem unable or unwilling to apply to their own writings the normal, customary scholarly methods and practices which routinely apply to other fields of inquiry. One wonders why this is the case?

There is something remarkably peculiar about many (perhaps most) books which right-wing conspiracy believers produce.

1. First, there is almost always no independent research.

In almost no case, does the conspiracy author indicate any direct contact with the persons and organizations he writes about. No interviews. No correspondence. No emails. No phone conversations. No questions posed. No archival research. Nothing.

For example: W. Cleon Skousen and Gary Allen (in their respective books, *The Naked Capitalist* and *None Dare Call It Conspiracy*) relied heavily upon Dr. Carroll Quigley's research as reported in his 1966 book entitled, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World In Our Time*.

Both Allen and Skousen quote extensively from or rely upon Quigley's book. Conspiracy adherents have used Allen and Skousen for decades as "proof" for whatever theory they wish to circulate.

However, neither Skousen or Allen reviewed the primary source documents upon which Quigley based his conclusions and which he cited in his book.

Consequently, neither Skousen or Allen are in a position to

(a) confirm that references cited by Quigley are accurate and truthful OR

(b) ascertain whether or not Quigley overlooked relevant material which could lend itself to a different interpretation from what Quigley presented OR

(c) decide whether or not Quigley placed too much emphasis on, or gave too much credence to, data in documents which he saw

- Furthermore, neither Skousen or Allen ever contacted Quigley to ask questions about his research, or to request copies of documents relevant to their own writings, or to inquire into other aspects of the subject matter they considered to be of critical importance.

- Neither Skousen or Allen did any seminal research of their own into other archival material pertaining to their subject matter. Instead, they both just make extensive use of secondary sources, i.e. they both just repeat assertions made by other persons.

Bill McIlhany (a Birch Society author) has correctly pointed out the limitations of using secondary sources in his opus, *Evidence of a Master Conspiracy*:

"The trouble with secondary sources is that they really are no stronger than the primary or contemporary documentation they contain. If you're reading a book written by someone today about the French Revolution of over two hundred years ago, and it says that it was caused by some particular historical force or movement, you have no way of knowing whether that is true unless you can examine the evidence put forth for the claim."

The fact that a secondary source makes a statement about something only proves one thing: that that book or article

made that statement. If you want to be critical in your thinking (it's always good, as the Bible says, to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good), you certainly need to test anything which you encounter. One way of doing that is to know whether or not the secondary source has any documentation. When you get a secondary historical account what's the first thing you do? You can look to see if it has any footnotes or bibliography...Is the book quoting simply from people who already agree with the thesis that the book is presenting or is it going back to more primary material?"

2. Second, if you check a representative sample of books authored by conspiracy proponents, there are two remarkable anomalies, as follows:

(a) IF there are any bibliographic footnotes, they often are predominantly secondary sources instead of primary sources. In addition, the secondary sources often merely express personal opinions or interpretations.

Sometimes the footnotes turn out to be editorials, opinion columnists, letters-to-the-editor, or gossip columns in newspapers. In many other cases, the footnotes consist of material inserted into the *Congressional Record* without the author ever checking the accuracy of the original source! [See, for example, John Stormer's classic, *None Dare Call it Treason*.]

Consider the following specific example:

On page 69 of *None Dare Call It Conspiracy* by Gary Allen, he writes:

"According to the *New York Journal-American* of February 3, 1949:

'Today, it is estimated by Jacob's grandson, John Schiff, that the old man sank about 20,000,000 dollars for the final triumph of Bolshevism in Russia.' "

The clear implication is that Allen is quoting from a news report by a reputable major city daily newspaper -- perhaps even an interview with John Schiff about his grandfather.

However, in reality, the "quotation" used by Gary Allen actually appears in that newspaper's society gossip column by pseudonym "*Cholly Knickerbocker*"!! This is the type and quality of documentation which "*historian*" Gary Allen thinks is sufficiently credible. But how many of his readers would ever bother to check his reference??

(b) Genuine scholars and researchers routinely include "*acknowledgements*" and "*notes*" pages in their books. By contrast, conspiracy advocates almost never include such pages. In fact, before writing this article I quickly reviewed a couple dozen conspiracy books in my collection. NONE have an acknowledgements page. There is a reason for this! Why is that omission significant?

What is the purpose and significance of acknowledgements and/or notes pages?

(i) *First, they summarize the institutions and persons upon whom the author relied for research assistance. This gives the reader an idea of the extent, nature, and quality of the author's research, i.e. was he/she cognizant of the work done by other researchers and scholars plus was he/she aware of (and did he/she use) the major primary sources which exist? If not, why not?*

(ii) *Did the author consult any NEW sources which have never been previously utilized -- thus producing fresh insights?*

Example: During the past 10-15 years there has been a major upsurge in books which have explored the history of the postwar conservative and anti-communist movements in the U.S. (many started out as doctoral dissertations) and those books have often utilized new sources which never previously informed the judgments of other authors.

Frequently, for example, scholars have done extensive research into previously unavailable or little-known archives of private papers and/or oral histories of persons and organizations which directly bear upon whatever topics they discuss. In other cases, the author has interviewed, for the first time, key players in controversial matters--and has obtained unique insights from those interviews. In yet other instances, the author has obtained first-time-released documents via FOIA requests.

(iii) *Acknowledgment and notes pages often identify persons whom the author asked to review first drafts of the book*

(or perhaps specific chapters) in order to correct errors and suggest avenues for further research which the author may have overlooked.

Why is this important?

Because genuine scholars and independent researchers value critiques by knowledgeable independent sources. Such evaluations (before publication) help to reduce errors of fact, interpretation, and judgment.

(iv) When applicable, research grants which made the research possible are identified. Funding may be important because an author might be unwilling to contradict the premises and conclusions favored by the sources of his/her funds.

The complete absence of acknowledgements and notes pages in many conspiracy books is an indication that these folks depend exclusively upon the workings of their own mind. In short, there is no check-and-balance mechanism in place to recognize, acknowledge, and correct error.

CONSPIRACY "SCHOLARSHIP" – part 2

As we consider all of the numerous right-wing political theories in circulation, how do we choose which particular theory to believe? Many times these theories have mutually exclusive propositions. In other words, the theories cannot all be true simultaneously—but none of their respective adherents is prepared to acknowledge that their preferred theory is erroneous.

In an interview regarding the writings of Gary Allen and W. Cleon Skousen, Dr. Carroll Quigley made the following comment about his own research: **"I may be correct or I may be mistaken..."**

Which conspiracy believer(s) (either an individual or the entire conspiratorial school of thought that individual represents) has ever acknowledged the possibility that they might be entirely "*mistaken*"?

In other words, would a Bircher ever say about their CFR/New World Order theory: **"I may be correct or I may be mistaken"**? How about a Christian Identity conspiracy theorist? How about an adherent of William Pierce/National Alliance or Lyndon LaRouche or 9/11 conspiracy theorists or holocaust denial theorists?

Most of us readily acknowledge our fallibility as human beings but conspiracy proponents seem to start from the opposite point of view i.e. the only possibility of error exists in the non-believer community! Does that type of mindset recommend itself as being capable of discerning fact from fiction or dealing fairly and rationally with complex subject matter?

Ockham's razor and Counter-Intuitive Propositions

To believe any of the major right-wing political conspiracy theories requires us to set aside most of what humans have learned from historical experience and to accept the most counter-intuitive and complex explanations.

(1) Belief requires acceptance of the idea that thousands upon thousands of people have been willing participants in a conspiracy over a very long period of time but not one person has ever become disillusioned, and then defected, and then revealed confidential and damaging data about the existence of the conspiracy to legal authorities or congressional committees or the news media. [As news reports from Washington DC over the past couple years make manifestly clear, keeping secrets in our government (and in any free society) is very problematic.]

(2) Belief also requires acceptance of the idea that much more rigorous criminal conspiracies — i.e. ones that are held together by physical threats and intimidation and which often operate in closed environments — nevertheless routinely disintegrate and become known relatively shortly after inception...but less robust political conspiracies can somehow maintain superhuman iron discipline and never be revealed or compromised by insiders even after decades of existence.

By "*more rigorous criminal conspiracies*" I refer to the fact that certain conspiracies involve intimately-connected persons who operate in an environment where they directly control rewards and punishments and they can inflict immediate and substantial harm upon uncooperative individuals plus the conspirators are often trained in, and have little compunction about using, violence to achieve their objectives—which in this case is silence.

In recent weeks and months, for example, we have seen media reports about conspiracy indictments or trial verdicts involving police officers, military personnel, prison officials, and organized crime figures. These folks work in an environment which routinely involves threats, intimidation, and violence to keep people in line.

Police and prison officers can plant evidence, falsely testify regarding criminal intent/behavior, or they may inflict extreme psychic pressure and harassment upon non-cooperative individuals. The "code of silence" which prevails among their peers often shields them from exposure. Furthermore, the scope of their type of conspiracy often involves a very small number of people who are under the direct control, supervision, or purview of the conspirators. In addition, there is the societal pre-disposition to believe whatever a policeman or prison employee might say as compared to testimony from convicted criminals or persons perceived as sociopaths and predators.

Similarly, military personnel can engage in torture, extreme forms of harassment, or even kill persons they claim were "combatants" OR they can allege "collateral damage" has occurred which covers-up their own illegal acts (including murder) and thus they can feel confident that their criminal acts and their conspiracy will remain un-exposed.

By contrast, the tools available to the CFR-NWO crowd to discourage and prevent exposure of their conspiracy by co-conspirators or witnesses are much more subtle and much less compelling. Nevertheless, the police, military, organized crime, and prison conspiracies are routinely penetrated, exposed, and prosecuted despite their more self-sealing or invisible quality.

But we are asked to believe that the alleged CFR-NWO conspiracy (or comparable other alleged political conspiracies) can operate with invisibility and impunity decade after decade.

THE UNDERLYING DYNAMIC OF POLITICAL CONSPIRACY THEORY

A while back I stumbled across the results of a poll whose respondents were Birch Society members/sympathizers in the New Orleans area.

The poll question was "*Who killed Nicholas Berg?*".

51% of respondents thought our CIA killed Berg.

14% agreed with the following statement about Berg: "*He's not dead. It was staged.*"

What possible methodology could one employ to prove either contention false (to the satisfaction of those Birchers?)

As previously noted, the actual content of any given conspiracy theory is of secondary importance. Instead, one needs to understand the underlying dynamic at work.

Conspiracy theorists present themselves as being uniquely insightful, i.e. they perceive relationships, unearth data, and connect dots which escape 99% of the rest of humanity.

Why is it then, that their self-proclaimed superior intellect, research skills, and analytical abilities are never employed to first DISPROVE the most compelling competing theories which they believe to be erroneous?

For example:

- Why can't Birchers definitively refute Christian Identity theories?
- Why can't Birchers even convince their own dissident elements (originating from within the JBS) that they have concocted a theory which makes false sinister, defamatory assertions about the background of many of the original JBS National Council members whom, it is alleged, were actually secret CFR, freemason, Illuminati agents?
- Why can't Willis Carto adherents definitively refute LaRouchian theories?

· Why can't CFR/New World Order/elitist hidden government theorists definitively refute holocaust denial or other anti-semitic theories?

In the process of successfully refuting alternative theories, these folks would win legions of new followers to their own clearly demonstrated superior theory! So why don't they refute the competing theories?

Conspiracy theory acts as a psychological tonic and establishes one's own "superior" understanding of events and "*the way things really are*".

Most political conspiracy theories presume a conscious, coherent plan in operation for decades which proceeds almost flawlessly without ever being exposed by its participants or witnesses.

In fact, it is this very quality (**ultra-coherence**) which renders conspiracy theories so implausible. Conspiracy theories provide a degree of order and clarity which rarely exists in human affairs. (see "*epistemology*" section below for further comments).

So, under what circumstances would someone voluntarily relinquish such a potent elixir and revert to an ordinary mortal's weak, ambiguous, or unsatisfying understanding of history and contemporary events?

Conspiracy theories speak to an internal need for neat, orderly, and unambiguous identification of enemies that one should vanquish and render impotent within society.

From the perspective of the conspiracy adherent, nothing could be worse than for objective conditions to improve—i.e. if the improvement requires relinquishing some portion of their mistaken dogma.

Over many decades, when one's personal political preferences are not accepted or implemented, it may be too difficult for political conspiracy believers to candidly acknowledge that their ideas and proposals have little or no merit in the eyes of their fellow countrymen—so, naturally, the believers search around for an alternative explanation for the lack of popular support...and conspiracy theories fill the bill perfectly.

RECURRING EPISTEMOLOGICAL DILEMMAS IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The John Birch Society presents sound advice about conspiracy theories on its website: <http://www.jbs.org/conspiracy>

"Conspiracy theories abound on the Internet. While some may be fairly accurate, others are not. Much of what is out there goes beyond the facts into wild conjecturing, and even outright fabrication of information. This has had an effect something like Gresham's Law ('bad money drives out good money'), in which bad information drives out good information. What is fact? What is fiction? How can you know?"

How indeed?

CONTRADICTIONS

For the past 26 years I have submitted thousands of FOIA requests to the FBI and other government agencies. Most of my requests have focused on individuals, organizations, and publications recommended by the JBS as knowledgeable, authoritative, and reliable sources of information.

During this process, I have discovered a recurring phenomenon, namely, the sources recommended by the JBS often contradict themselves or they contradict other sources which the JBS recommends — which begs the following questions:

1. How do conspiracy believers resolve conflicting testimony when a source they recommend as honest, truthful and accurate nevertheless contradicts their own statements — including their sworn testimony before legislative committees or in a courtroom?

2. Similarly, how do conspiracy believers go about deciding whom and what to believe when two different sources (both of whom they describe as knowledgeable and reliable) come to different conclusions about the same subject matter?

For example:

(a) There are instances where FBI and Department of Justice informants who subsequently became paid speakers for the Birch Society made sensational statements or allegations during their JBS-sponsored speeches and writings. However, when one acquires their FBI or Department of Justice files — there is no record that they ever reported such data or raised such concerns during their time as an informant! Examples include: Rev. Delmar Dennis, Julia Brown, and Lola Belle Holmes.

(b) Furthermore, after they became paid speakers for the JBS, these folks have categorically contradicted their previous testimony before legislative committees, or in courtrooms, or in their articles and books.

EXCEPTIONALISM – How Do Conspiracies Operate?

Conspiracy believers often propose that we must accept what I describe as their “exceptionalism” argument – i.e. the notion that we cannot apply our accumulated historical knowledge about conspiracies to the contemporary conspiracy alleged to be in operation.

In this scheme of things, we are asked to believe that the “CFR-New World Order” conspiracy which they allege has been in existence for decades does not operate according to normal rules of human behavior nor does it operate in the same manner (or leave footprints) as do all other conspiracies about which we have knowledge. Hence, we are asked to believe that the methodology successfully used to detect, penetrate, and expose previous conspiracies in U.S. history is now inapplicable.

ALL conspiracies are populated by actors who do not wish to be detected.

ALL conspiracies involve secrecy and deception.

ALL conspiracies use methods to hide and protect the conspirators and thwart penetration by outsiders

ALL conspiracies have had defectors or disillusioned participants or witnesses that have come forward to expose the conspiracy.

During my many debates with JBS members and other believers in a “*Council on Foreign Relations-New World Order*” conspiracy, I have developed a series of questions which I use to focus attention upon the intrinsic absurdity of many of their propositions. I present some of those questions below because they can be used to expose the defects within many conspiracy arguments (just substitute the alleged current conspiratorial actor for CFR-NWO).

(1) What is the definition of NORMAL political behavior? In other words, what criteria determines when behavior is conspiratorial as opposed to normal political activity?

(2) Has there ever been a period in U.S. history when conspiratorial forces were not predominant?

(3) Which objectives are the CFR-NWO conspiracy pursuing that it cannot achieve by non-conspiratorial means? For example, according to the most recent edition of the John Birch Society “*Freedom Index*” (which scores all members of Congress with respect to “*their adherence to constitutional principles of limited government, fiscal responsibility, national sovereignty, and a traditional foreign policy of avoiding foreign entanglements*”) — the average score for the House of Representatives is 43% and the average score for the Senate is 36%. In other words, the alleged CFR-NWO crowd (aka “*Establishment elite*”) apparently has been successful at achieving its objectives through the legislative process—so why do they require some kind of “*conspiracy*” to achieve what they want?

(4) Are political conspirators ordinary mortals? Do they function in the same manner as ordinary people? For example, do they have the same range of emotions such as anger, jealousy, envy, pride, admiration, respect?

(5) Are the persons involved in political conspiracies omniscient or omnipotent? If not, are they fallible? Are they susceptible to the same weaknesses and defects experienced by ordinary people such as: stupidity, desire for

revenge, failure to accomplish assigned tasks, inability to resolve personality conflicts, inability to work well with co-conspirators, incompetence, failure to anticipate adverse results of their actions or decisions?

(6) From our knowledge of previous conspiracies...

- typically, how long from the inception of the conspiracy did it take before the existence of the conspiracy became known?
- how are conspiracies normally organized? For example: are there regularly scheduled meetings? Are any notes taken? Are there written memos, reports, or any other documentary evidence? Is there any sort of organizational chart?
- How do conspirators communicate with each other? For example: when a new policy or objective is decided upon, how does senior management of the conspiracy inform their subordinates? Newsletter? Phone calls? Emails? In-person discussions? Or what?
- Do the conspirators usually have regular full-time jobs doing things un-related to the conspiracy? If so, how much time are they normally able to devote to the conspiracy? Does the conspiracy normally take priority over their family life? If so, this must create tension or acrimony within their families who feel neglected—just as is the case with many prominent persons whose careers absorb most of their time. What evidence do we have of such conspirator family quarrels or friction?

(7) Every conspiracy we can name (for example: Mafia, Watergate, CPUSA, tobacco companies, Enron, KKK) has produced insiders who defected and told their stories to law enforcement, legislative committees, and/or news media. Specify some defectors from the “CFR-New World Order” conspiracy.

(8) In every organization involving human beings there is competition for leadership and influence. That competition often leads to internal disputes and hurt feelings. Usually, policy or personal differences result in acrimonious exchanges, and, consequently, someone leaks embarrassing information as “payback” to get even. Is there such evidence in CFR-NWO conspiracy history?

(9) How is the conspiracy financed? What financial records, if any, are kept and by whom? Are the records audited in any way? Does the conspiracy assess dues or require periodic financial contributions?

(10) Every conspiracy we know about has produced defectors or disillusioned participants or witnesses who copied confidential internal documents and then released them to law enforcement or Congressional investigators or the news media. The documents often reveal membership or financial data, mailing lists, or other confidential information. Are there any such defectors, witnesses, or disillusioned participants who have provided such documentary evidence about the CFR-NWO conspiracy?

(11) With respect to specific defectors or disillusioned participants...

Have they made any statement which summarized their conspiratorial career? In other words, something that starts with “*I joined the conspiracy*” on (date) and then proceeds to explain (a) their reasons for joining, and (b) what his/her specific role was in the conspiracy, i.e. what tasks he/she was assigned, and (c) why and when he/she left the conspiracy?

Was the conspirator unsuccessful at any assigned task? If so, specify examples.

Does the participant state whether or not he/she was a junior or senior officer within the conspiracy? OR was he/she just a follower of orders but not a decision-maker?

How often did the conspirator attend conspiracy meetings? Who was present at those meetings? After the meetings, did the conspirator prepare written notes about what transpired? What plots were discussed at these meetings and which of those plots did the conspirator participate in?

What specific tasks was the conspirator assigned by their superiors after joining? Who were their superiors? How much direct contact did conspirators have with their superiors? Was that contact by phone or in writing, in person, or what? Are there any records of such contacts?

Are there any documents (or confirming testimony by other members of the conspiracy) that establishes that the defecting conspirator was actually a member of that conspiracy and which also discusses the conspirator's status within the hierarchy of the conspiracy?

(12) By definition, conspiracy refers to illegal behavior so....

On what date(s) did the conspirator first contact law enforcement authorities to report his/her participation in the conspiracy and the illegal activities he/she was associated with?

Do law enforcement records confirm such contact(s)?

Did the conspirator prepare a sworn affidavit or testify under oath in court or before any legislative committees about his/her participation in a conspiracy?

If the conspirator never reported his/her participation in the conspiracy to law enforcement or other entities – then how do we know that he/she genuinely left the conspiracy?

How do we determine whether or not a conspirator genuinely departed from the conspiracy as opposed to merely pretending to be a defector in order to become a disinformation agent to confuse authorities and the public about the actual existence, operations or objectives of the conspiracy OR for the conspirator to protect his/her own reputation to prevent any legal jeopardy for his/her own actions?

By revealing the names of their co-conspirators, the defecting conspirator would expect hostility and reprisals. Can you cite some examples of such hostility and reprisals directed against the defecting conspirator — such as comments made in court testimony, newspaper or magazine articles, interviews, or on websites — where the defecting conspirator is denounced?

<https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/full/10.1027/1864-9335/a000306>

In recent years, psychologists have made significant ground in understanding what draws people to conspiracy theories. For example, personality traits such as openness to experience (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Furnham, 2010; Swami et al., 2011), distrust (Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig, & Gregory, 1999; Goertzel, 1994; Wagner-Egger & Bangerter, 2007), low agreeability (Swami et al., 2010, 2011), narcissism (Cichocka, Marchlewska, & Golec de Zavala, 2016), and Machiavellianism (Douglas & Sutton, 2011) are associated with conspiracy belief.

In terms of cognitive processes, people with stronger conspiracy beliefs are more likely to overestimate the likelihood of co-occurring events (Brotherton & French, 2014), to attribute intentionality where it is unlikely to exist (Brotherton & French, 2015; Douglas, Sutton, Callan, Dawtry, & Harvey, 2016), and to have lower levels of analytic thinking (Swami, Voracek, Stieger, Tran, & Furnham, 2014).

Conspiracy theories also appear to have important consequences, such as negatively influencing health decisions (Jolley & Douglas, 2014a; Oliver & Wood, 2014), decreasing intentions to engage in politics (Butler, Koopman, & Zimbardo, 1995; Jolley & Douglas, 2014b), increasing people's desire to leave their workplace (Douglas & Leite, in press), and reducing environmental behavioral intentions (Douglas & Sutton, 2015; Jolley & Douglas, 2014b; Lewandowsky, Oberauer, & Gignac, 2013; van der Linden, 2015).

Further, some research suggests that conspiracy theories may perform certain functions for the self, allowing people to regain a sense of control (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008), order (van Harreveld, Rutjens, Schneider, Nohlen, & Keskinis, 2014), power (Gray, 2010; Sapountzis & Condor, 2013), and to relieve death anxiety (Newheiser, Farias, & Tausch, 2011).

The current research aims to further contribute to current knowledge about the personal needs that may be satisfied by conspiracy belief. Among the self-related motivations that could influence belief in conspiracy theories, we will argue that the *need for uniqueness* should play a role in people's adherence to conspiracy theories. More specifically, our general claim is that people with a high need for uniqueness should be more likely to believe in conspiracy theories.

MY RESEARCH (including links to my reports on the Birch Society):

<http://ernie1241.googlepages.com/home> More info: ernie1241@aol.com